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**THE HISTORY OF THE "THROWING-STICK" WHICH  
DRIFTED FROM ALASKA TO GREENLAND.**

BY JOHN MURDOCH.

One of the strongest arguments advanced by Dr. Frithiof Nansen, whose successful expedition across Greenland has won him so much honor, in favor of his plan for reaching the North Pole by drifting with the ice north and west from Bering Strait is the fact that an Eskimo "throwing-stick" or handle for casting darts has undoubtedly made this very drift.

Reviewing the evidence in the March number of *Naturen*, he shows conclusively that this little piece of wood, fortunately of such characteristic shape that its history is unmistakable, has floated from Bering Strait to the west coast of Greenland, undoubtedly passing over or close to the North Pole.

As this remarkable case has attracted little or no attention outside of the Danish and Norwegian journals, I propose here to review in detail the history of the specimen. Some time ago the Norwegian Magazine *Naturen* published a notice of the meeting of the "Videnskabselskab" at Christiania on June 11, 1886.\* In this notice it was stated that "Y. Nielsen (the curator of the University Museum) exhibited a throwing-stick for a harpoon, found among driftwood at Godthaab; it is of a form unknown in Greenland, but agrees completely with the throwing-stick used in Alaska. It has therefore probably made the same journey as the relics of the Jeannette expedition found at Julianehaab."

It immediately occurred to me that with the extensive collections at our disposal in the National Museum, in connection with the observations published by Professor Mason, † it would be easy to arrive at an almost certain conclusion about the specimen in question. I therefore wrote at once to Dr. Rink, in Christiania, who I know would be interested in any matter concerning the Eskimos, and who was probably present at the meeting of June 11,

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\* *Naturen*, vol. 10, No. 11, p. 176.

† Throwing-sticks in the National Museum. By Otis T. Mason. (Smithsonian Report, 1884, pt. II, pp. 279-289.)

making further inquiries about the specimen, asking especially for a figure of the throwing-stick if one could be procured.

With his usual promptness and courtesy, Dr. Rink at once responded by sending me a carefully made outline sketch of the specimen drawn by himself.

I had not the slightest difficulty in identifying this with one of Mason's types, namely, that used in the Kaviak Peninsula, Norton Sound, and the Yukon Delta. It most closely resembles a specimen from the Kaviak Peninsula now in the National Museum. It was seen at once that the resemblance between these two objects was altogether too striking to be the result of accident. I then wrote to Dr. Rink, stating that in my opinion the "throwing-stick" was undoubtedly Alaskan and probably from the Kaviak Peninsula.

On receiving this confirmation of his previous views in regard to the origin of the specimen, Dr. Rink published a paper in the "*Geografisk Tidsskrift*,"\* in which he gives the history of the specimen in detail. This account adds considerably to the authenticity of the "find."

It appears that Dr. Rink himself found the throwing-stick, which the Greenlanders at once recognized as different from any they had ever before seen, among the driftwood collected at Godthaab some years ago. This driftwood, as is well-known, is brought round Cape Farewell from the east and carried up the west coast of Greenland. Quite by accident, as he says, Dr. Rink preserved the specimen until 1886, when the university at Christiania received a valuable selection of ethnographical specimens from the Danish East Greenland expedition under Holm and Garde. He then presented the specimen to the university, apparently supposing that it came from the same region. On examination, however, it proved that it was different from the East Greenland throwing-sticks, as well as from those from the west. The well-known Norwegian traveler, Jakobsen, who has collected in Alaska, as well as in Greenland and Labrador, was struck, on examining the collection, with the resemblance of this specimen of unknown origin to those he had seen in Alaska. This gave rise to Nielsen's communication to the "*Videnskabselskab*," in which he compared the probable drift of this object to that of the Jeannette relics, in confirmation of Professor Mohn's theory of a current running across close to the North Pole.

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\*Formodet Drift of et Fangeredskab fra Alaska til Greenland. (*Geografisk Tidsskrift*, vol. 9, No. 4, pp. 75-76. Copenhagen, 1887.)

The points specially mentioned by Dr. Rink as those in which this specimen differs from those used in Greenland, namely, the "pocket" for the forefinger and the peg for one of the other fingers, are precisely those which indicate its Alaskan origin. The fact that it is inlaid with beads, though Dr. Rink lays considerable stress on this, is probably a mere accident and of no value in classification, though it appears to be true that this style of ornamentation is far more common in Alaska than in the east. Of more importance is the shallow groove along the back of the implement, appearing on both specimens compared. The general resemblance in shape between the two is especially striking.

It seems to me unreasonable to doubt that the implement in question was actually made in Alaska, not far from Bering Strait, and there seems to be no way of accounting for its presence at Godthaab, unless it really drifted all the way from Bering Strait to the coast of Greenland. What we actually know of the currents in the Arctic Ocean indicates the possibility of such a drift. There appears to be more or less of a northerly current north of Bering Strait, and the drift of the *Jeannette* itself indicates a constant westerly movement in high northern latitudes.

Dr. Rink's suggestion that we know nothing of the people who undoubtedly inhabit the east coast of Greenland north of latitude 68, and that this implement may have been made by them, appears to me to carry less weight than he supposes. Mason has shown in the paper mentioned above that this implement has developed in certain distinct lines, which have a definite geographical distribution. The specimen in question belongs to a highly specialized type, widely different from the equally specialized type found in Greenland. If in any part of East Greenland a throwing-stick was found resembling that used in the Mackenzie River district, there would be nothing surprising in it, for this implement is of an exceedingly simple and generalized pattern, but it is in the highest degree improbable that specialization should result in two forms identically the same in regions so far apart.

In the preceding remarks I have followed the nomenclature of Professor Mason and most other American and English writers in calling these implements "throwing-sticks." They are also called "throwing-boards," "hand-boards," or "darting-boards." The objection has been raised to these names that "throwing-stick" should mean a stick to be thrown, like those used by many savages,

while "hand-board" is too indefinite, giving no indication of the use of the implement.

On the drawing furnished me by Dr. Rink he has written the name "harpoon thrower." This seems to me an entirely unobjectionable and very expressive name, and I think its use in ethnographic work is much to be commended.

[The above point with reference to the ineligibility of the name "throwing-sticks" for these implements seems well taken. Dr. Rink's term "harpoon thrower" while perfectly applicable to the implement used by the Eskimo is quite out of place elsewhere, as in Australia, where the implement in question has a wide distribution. It is suggested that the term spear thrower is preferable since it covers the functions of the implement fully, and sufficiently distinguishes it from the throwing club or stick, also of wide distribution, which is a missile.—EDITOR.]

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THE ANDAMANS AND ANDAMANESE.—In an article entitled "The Andamans and Andamanese" (*Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Feb., 1889, pp. 57-73) Col. T. Cadell, Chief Commissioner of the Andaman Islands, gives an interesting general account of these very primitive savages. Perhaps the most striking thing in the article is the favorable account he gives of the appearance and disposition of these people, who have generally been presented to the world in a very unfavorable light. He scouts the idea of their ever having been cannibals, and goes on to describe them as "well-made, dapper little fellows," with "smiling, innocent faces," and "pleasant to look upon"—"such jolly, merry little people. \* \* \* You cannot imagine how taking they are. Every one who has to do with them falls in love with them." By kindness and liberality the English have succeeded in gaining the affections of all the inhabitants of Great Andaman except the Járáwas, who speak a "totally different language" and differ in their customs and weapons, and friendly relations are gradually being established with the people of Little Andaman.

JOHN MURDOCH.